
independently verified by New Jersey State Police personnel. It is hoped that the findings will enhance the collective understanding about the phenomenon of gangs in New Jersey, and will prompt discussion about solutions.

METHODOLOGY

2001 NJSP Gang Survey

Survey Design

In 2001, NJSP personnel developed a questionnaire that modeled the content and format of the National Youth Gang Center's (NYGC) annual survey, which has been administered nationwide since 1995 (see Appendix A for a copy of the 2001 NJSP Gang Survey). The decision to pose questions similar to those contained in the NYGC survey instrument allowed analysts to compare results from the NJSP survey with the data from the 1998 NYGC survey (the latest year for which complete data were available in 2001).

Survey Sample

For the 2001 survey, NJSP personnel selected 206 municipal law enforcement agencies to sample. The agencies were chosen because one or more of their personnel had attended NJSP sponsored gang awareness and recognition training. In an effort to maximize data consistency and completeness, the 2001 survey was administered as a telephone interview. Interviewers attempted to speak with the officer who attended training. When that was not possible, they spoke with a juvenile officer or other sworn member who was deemed knowledgeable on the subject of gangs. In addition to the municipal agency sample, county prosecutors offices and sheriffs departments in all 21 New Jersey counties were surveyed using a questionnaire that differed slightly.

Response Rate

Of the 206 agencies selected, officers from 195 police departments were contacted and interviewed (a response rate of nearly 95%). The remaining representatives did not return interviewers' phone calls. The respondents represented approximately 40% of all municipal agencies with full-time police forces. A complete list of respondents is found in Appendix B.

2004 NJSP Gang Survey

Survey Design

On the whole, the 2004 survey content resembled the 2001 NJSP Gang Survey. Most questions remained unchanged, or were only slightly modified by the addition of follow-up/clarification questions. The inclusion of the identically worded core questions allowed the analysis to focus on:

- identifying short-term trends developing in the gang environment
- conducting tracking analysis in municipalities that responded to both the 2001 and 2004 surveys

In addition to the core questions, several new questions were added. They dealt with the following topics: identification of the most actively recruiting and the most violent gangs, the use of gang tracking systems by law enforcement, the general location of gang crimes, and the agencies with whom the respondent had frequent contact on the issue of gangs (see Appendix C for a copy of the 2004 NJSP Gang Survey Questionnaire).

Survey Sample

Street Gang Bureau personnel wanted to maximize the number of police departments sampled in the 2004 NJSP Gang Survey. The population sample comprised all 479 municipalities within the state of New Jersey that maintain full-time police departments².

As in the 2001 survey, a similar questionnaire was sent out to county level agencies. This time prosecutors, sheriffs and county level correctional institutions were all sent surveys. Their responses are to be examined at a later time and compared with the answers given by the municipalities.

Survey Administration

This survey did differ from the earlier one in that some respondents were asked to complete the survey through an interview conducted by New Jersey State Police (NJSP) personnel or by filling out a questionnaire mailed to them. This method was chosen in order to get a more responses than would have been possible by interviews alone. Police departments that sent personnel to attend NJSP street gang awareness training were selected for the interviews, while the remaining municipalities were mailed the surveys (with a self-addressed, postage-paid envelope included in each packet). In early November of 2004, a follow-up letter and survey was mailed to municipalities that did not respond to the first mailing in March.

Response Rate

Of 479 municipalities deemed eligible to take part in this survey, 439 municipalities responded either by completing and returning a survey that was mailed to them, or by indicating their responses during an interview.

The 439 responding municipalities represent 78% of all municipalities generally, and 91% of all municipalities with a full-time police force. Responding municipalities comprise 87% of the state's total population. A complete list of respondents is found in Appendix D.

While the survey did receive a significant response, there were some agencies that either did not respond in time to have their data included in this survey or did not respond at all. These absences may become more pronounced when we attempt to draw conclusions at the county level (envisioned to be the second part of this survey to be released later) but they are worth noting here. The following

² There are 566 municipalities in New Jersey, most of whom maintain their own police force. The remaining municipalities employ a part-time police force, or rely on some other agency, such as the State Police, for patrol support.

are the ten most populous municipalities for whom we were not able to include results for this survey:

**10 Most Populous Municipalities Not Participating
in the 2004 NJSP Gang Survey**

| County | Agency Name | Population (2000 Census Data) |
|---------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Gloucester | Franklin Township Police Dept. | 15,466 |
| Burlington | Maple Shade Police Dept. | 22,253 |
| Morris | Rockaway Police Dept. | 22,930 |
| Morris | Roxbury Township Police Dept. | 23,883 |
| Gloucester | Monroe Township Police Dept. | 28,967 |
| Bergen | Hackensack Police Dept. | 42,677 |
| Union | Union Police Dept. | 54,405 |
| Passaic | Passaic Police Dept. | 67,861 |
| Camden | Camden Police Dept. | 79,904 |
| Mercer | Hamilton Township Police Dept. | 87,109 |

Survey Limitations

Methodology/Administration of Survey

When comparing the results of the 2001 and 2004 NJSP Gang Surveys, it is important to note that content and the method of administration was different. In 2001, when respondents answered “no” or “don’t know” to the first question, “were any street gangs active in your jurisdiction?,” the telephone interview was concluded.

In 2004, some respondents completed the remainder of the survey even though they answered “no” or “don’t know” to question about active gangs. However, 2004 respondents did not answer every question. If they felt the question was not applicable, or if they did not know the answer, respondents often skipped the question altogether. Thus, the response rates for each question in the 2004 survey varied, while in 2001, only respondents who answered “yes” to the first question answered subsequent questions.

Definitions

The only term for which a definition was provided to respondents in either the 2001 or 2004 survey questionnaire was for “gang.” In 2001, the National Youth Gang Center definition was adopted, which defined “street gang” as:

*“a group of youths or young adults **IN YOUR JURISDICTION** that you or other people in your agency are willing to identify or classify as a gang. This definition **DOES NOT INCLUDE** motorcycle gangs, hate or ideology groups, or prison gangs.”*

In 2004, in order to be consistent with New Jersey statute, the term ‘gang,’ was defined as:

“three or more people who are associated in fact, that is, people who have a common group name, identifying sign, tattoos or other indicia of association and who have engaged in criminal offenses while engaged in gang related activity” (NJSA 2C:44-3h).

In both years, other terms such as ‘most serious problem,’ ‘gang-related incidents,’ and ‘gang crimes’ were not defined in survey instructions. In analyzing the results of the 2004 municipal responses, it became apparent that the lack of articulated definitions for some terms led to different interpretations for some questions. For example, the first question of the survey asks the respondent to consider whether any street gangs were active in their jurisdiction during the preceding year. The term “active” may have been interpreted by respondents as “actively committing crimes” rather than “present” or “observed.”

This was apparent when the results of a subsequent question were analyzed. One in ten (10%) respondents answered “no” or “don’t know” to the question about whether street gangs were “active” in their jurisdiction, yet later identified gangs by name in the question that asked, “Which gangs are present in your jurisdiction?” Respondents sometimes noted in comments that these gangs were “transient” or “passing through.” Providing a definition of “active” and “present” might have resolved this issue. It is unknown if the respondents to the 2001 survey interpreted the term “active” as “actively committing crimes” vs. “present”.

Perceptions of responding agencies

In the data collection phase of this project, efforts were made to direct the surveys to respondents who had attended one of the NJSP Street Gang Bureau’s training seminars. It was believed that those respondents would have a baseline of knowledge about gangs and would respond fairly consistently. However, police departments, like anywhere else, are dynamic environments and individual officers who received training sometimes moved on to different assignments. Further, for agencies who had not sent officers to NJSP sponsored gang awareness training, surveys were sent directly to the department chiefs who either completed the surveys themselves or delegated the responsibility to officers they felt were most qualified to answer the questionnaire. Regardless of who completed the survey, the respondent was instructed to base his/her responses on their records, their personal knowledge, and/or consultations with other agency personnel who are familiar with street gangs.

Although the survey instructions indicated that respondents could consult with other members of their agency before answering the survey, it became apparent in reviewing 2004 responses that individual responses differed even among members of the same agency. In a few instances, more than one survey was returned from the same department (most likely the result of the second mailing that was generated in November 2004). A review of these duplicate responses revealed that it was not uncommon for officers in the same agency to respond differently to the same survey question, even when the question was a basic one about whether or not there were active gangs in their jurisdiction.

There are several possible explanations for this difference in reported answers among members of the same police department. First, and most likely, is the possibility that the responses are subjective, reflecting an individual officer's perception based on his/her training and experience. An officer who receives gang awareness training may be more likely to report the presence of gangs in his or her jurisdiction if he or she is able to interpret gang indicia that other officers do not observe. Secondly, the presence or perceived presence of gangs can have significant political, economic and social consequences for municipalities, and within a particular jurisdiction, there may be political pressure to deny or exaggerate the existence of gangs. Every police chief was notified about the survey--either requesting their assistance in completing the questionnaire, or as a courtesy to advise them that their personnel would be interviewed at a later date. The responses that resulted may or may not represent the 'official' position of a particular police department.

An additional limitation is the exclusive focus on law enforcement's perception of the problem. By surveying only law enforcement agencies, other possible sources of information (such as schools, community groups, social service organizations, etc.) that may have extensive knowledge and experience with the subject of gangs are not represented. Those perspectives would undoubtedly contribute to a more complete understanding of the issue. The decision to survey law enforcement officers was based on past practices, infrastructure and resources. This survey was conceived as a complementary, local effort to the National Youth Gang Center's Annual Gang Survey, which targets law enforcement officers at the local, county, and state levels. Secondly, in terms of infrastructure, it was a straightforward process to determine the population sample (all New Jersey municipal agencies with a full-time police department) and to identify the contact personnel from those departments who had been trained in gang awareness and recognition. Similar records and infrastructure were not available for non-law enforcement entities. Resources to conduct and analyze surveys were stretched to capacity collecting and processing data from the various law enforcement agencies; including hundreds more agencies would have extended the scope of the inquiry beyond the original intent of the project, and would have been unmanageable.